

ATTACHMENT


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DECLARATION OF LINDA WEISINGER

I, Linda Weisinger, hereby state as follows:

I am over the age of eighteen and am competent to make this Declaration. I have personal knowledge of the matters set forth below.

1. I am the Deputy Director at Stop Wasting Abandoned Property, Inc. ("SWAP"). SWAP is a non-profit community development organization formed in 1975 and located at 439 Pine Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02907.
2. SWAP is committed to providing affordable housing opportunities for persons of low and moderate income, revitalizing urban neighborhoods, and building new communities. SWAP's constituents are low-income and a vast majority of them are African American and Hispanic.
3. SWAP started out as a sweat equity program. Community members saw properties in their neighborhoods being demolished or abandoned and wanted to take action, and so they renovated an abandoned house in South Providence. Today, SWAP rents apartments and sells houses and offers a variety of programs to the community, including classes on homebuyer education and landlord/tenant law.
4. SWAP also renovates houses for low-income families and individuals based in Providence, Rhode Island. SWAP practices block-by-block renovation. SWAP acquires properties on a particular block, and revitalizes that block to stimulate and encourage home owners to move there. This revitalization not only creates affordable housing opportunities, it increases property and appraisal values in the surrounding neighborhoods. SWAP also assists homebuyers to get the best mortgage package for SWAP properties. All of SWAP's work is aimed at increasing equity and affordable housing opportunities in underserved communities.



5. I have worked at SWAP since 1993. From June 1993 to January 2002, I was the Development Manager at SWAP. In this capacity, I showed SWAP houses to potential homebuyers, and I worked with mortgage lenders to seek pre-approval for applicants. I also mapped abandoned properties and vacant lots within South Providence, and I researched background information on potential properties, including ownership history, outstanding taxes, legal use, zoning, and title research. I also engaged community residents to become more involved in neighborhood activities.

6. From January 2002 to January 2004, I worked as the Homeownership Director at SWAP. In this position, I was responsible for growing SWAP's homeownership department, including developing housing for buyers of various income levels. I expanded our housing development efforts to include more neighborhoods within the City of Providence. I also planned and implemented marketing and sales programs to sell houses under development.

7. From January 2004 to September 2006, I was the Deputy Director of Homeownership and Acquisitions at SWAP. In this position, I increased annual homeownership sales. I also identified new neighborhoods for both residential and commercial revitalization efforts.

8. Since September 2006, I have been the Deputy Director of SWAP. In this position, I am responsible for all aspects of homeownership and commercial sales from initial pre-qualification through post-closing. I have overseen sales of SWAP properties in excess of \$15 million. I conduct feasibility analyses, property and title research, and property negotiation and acquisition of all properties for potential development, including foreclosed properties. I secure pre-development financing, construction financing, and permanent financing for SWAP properties. I also oversee SWAP's Homeownership Education Programs, including classes on

homebuyer education, landlord/tenant law, condominium ownership, post purchase education for homeowners, foreclosure prevention and acquisition of foreclosed and distressed properties.

9. SWAP has close connections with other community development organizations in Providence. I am the Chair of the Home Ownership Committee, which allows me to work with these other community development groups. We meet every month and discuss community development and housing issues affecting Rhode Island. We also design marketing and home open house programs. These programs allow us to reach out to the community, inform constituents about our home education programs, and ultimately identify qualified home buyers.

10. Certain financial institutions are willing to provide mortgages to purchasers of SWAP properties. Some of our partners include Rhode Island Housing, Coastway Community Bank, Bank of Rhode Island, Navigant Credit Union, Pawtucket Credit Union, and Webster Bank.

11. RBS Citizens Bank ("Citizens") is an active supporter of SWAP and an active community participant. Citizens' representatives attend loan fairs and reach out to the communities in which SWAP works. Loan officers and originators from Citizens are present in the neighborhoods served by SWAP. In my experience, although Citizens does not ordinarily make loans directly through SWAP's programs, Citizens does provide loans to members of the underserved minority communities in Providence in which SWAP works.

12. In 2011, in recognition of its neighborhood revitalization efforts, SWAP received the Champions in Action award from Citizens. As an awardee, Citizens provided SWAP a \$25,000 unrestricted grant and volunteer support to continue its work building and renovating homes and providing other resources to underserved communities. We used this grant from

Citizens to fund educational workshops for renters and first-time homebuyers. In May 2005, SWAP received the Housing Heroes Award from Citizens, accompanied by a \$50,000 grant.

13. Working with SWAP homebuyers makes very good financial sense for banks. Homebuyers who purchase SWAP properties and participate in SWAP's education programs have a 90% retention rate, meaning that there are almost no foreclosures of SWAP properties.

14. This extremely high retention rate is the product of SWAP's education and consulting programs. SWAP assists both homebuyers and institutions to ensure that mortgage packages are good fits for borrowers. SWAP courses ensure that SWAP participants are educated on their homeowner and financial obligations. SWAP helps prospective homebuyers prepare financially before applying for mortgages. SWAP guides them on steps to become eligible and attractive borrowers, such as improving credit scores or savings. SWAP will look at prospective borrowers' financial profiles and make suggestions to enhance their eligibility for prime loans. For example, SWAP might suggest that a borrower wait a few months and pay off credit card debt before applying for a mortgage.

15. These financial readiness programs mean that by the time SWAP constituents apply for mortgages, they are safe bets for lenders. Financial institutions have very little work to do with SWAP constituents, because SWAP has helped prepare the prospective homebuyers to help them get qualified. Lenders can feel confident that SWAP constituents are a good investment because they are ready for homeownership and they will repay their mortgages.

16. The banks that work with SWAP understand that SWAP identifies and prepares sound mortgage candidates who are very low risk. These banks actively work to qualify SWAP constituents because they understand the value-added of SWAP's educational and financial readiness programs, which might not otherwise be accounted for by traditional borrower

assessment and underwriting programs. The best banks work with SWAP to review prospective borrowers' files and help them take measures to qualify for prime loans, by, for example, paying off other debt. They do not impose rigid requirements that unnecessarily deny loans to sound borrowers who are very little risk. The best loan officers from these banks will be in the neighborhoods reaching out to people and forming relationships with consumers.

17. SWAP's efforts not only revitalize neighborhoods, but also maintain stability for communities, borrowers, and lenders. For example, leading up to the 2008 foreclosure crisis, SWAP anticipated that sub-prime loans being pushed in minority communities were going to cause serious problems for both borrowers and lenders. SWAP discouraged its constituents from obtaining loans that were likely to become unaffordable and lead to defaults and foreclosures. Because of SWAP's efforts, the communities in which it worked were substantially more stable than other neighborhoods in Providence.

18. In my experience, Sovereign Bank (now known as Santander Bank) has had little presence in the communities in which SWAP works. Even though there is a Santander (formerly Sovereign) branch location not far from SWAP's offices, I have not had any dealings with a Sovereign or Santander representative in approximately fifteen years. As far as I know, Santander does not reach out to the communities in which SWAP works and it does not participate in housing fairs or other events in underserved communities in Providence. Unlike other banks that work with SWAP and minority homebuyers, Santander has little presence in the communities SWAP serves.

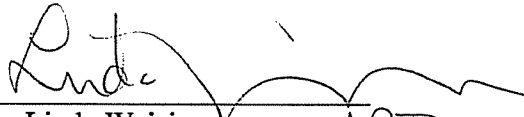
19. If Santander were willing to provide financing for SWAP homebuyers, it would be a huge benefit for both SWAP and minority communities in Providence. More prime credit from banks like Santander would mean more and different kinds of loan products available to

first-time homebuyers. Lenders would compete with each other to provide credit to these communities, which would increase the availability of access to products that make financial sense for both borrowers and lenders.

20. More prime refinancing credit from banks like Santander would also provide homeowners the opportunity to capitalize on low-interest rates and start re-building equity, which is particularly important for underserved communities hit disproportionately hard by the housing crisis. Financing by Santander would also allow SWAP to revitalize more blocks and neighborhoods and sell more properties in Providence. Development and renovation of properties is extremely important not only because it provides more housing opportunities, but also because it increases appraisal and property values of surrounding properties and neighborhoods.

I hereby declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct to the best of my knowledge, information and belief.

EXECUTED WITHIN THE UNITED STATES ON: March 5, 2014.

BY: 
Linda Weisinger SWAP Inc.